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ABSTRACT

A study examined the question of what sequence patterns, if any, of covering oral interpretation topics emerge from forensic coaching sessions. To answer the question it was first necessary to analyze the process used by the coaches. Process was defined as the action of passing through continuing development from a beginning to a contemplated end. Coaches were observed in order to determine the topics experts consider essential when preparing for oral interpretation of poetry. A list of 68 topics was compiled from leading textbooks, and the topics were grouped into 5 categories: (1) focus on literary analysis; (2) focus on delivery; (3) focus on audience; (4) focus on manuscript; and (5) focus on forensics. Topic coverage in 35 coaching sessions was examined. Of the 68 topics, only repetition, tension, audience context, and tournament functioning were not addressed in coaching sessions. Among topics most often addressed by coaches were storyline, theme, persona, and mood. In general, as the focus on literary analysis declined over the sessions, focus on delivery rose. Literary analysis topics tended to be covered early in coaching sessions. The fact that three of four topics found in all stages of coaching dealt with literary analysis is a strong indication that coaches emphasize the poems as literature study. (Four tables of data are included.) (SG)

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EXAMINING THE PROCESS OF COACHING THE ORAL INTERPRETATION OF POETRY

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Speech Communication Association

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EXAMINING THE PROCESS OF COACHING THE ORAL INTERPRETATION OF POETRY

Carolyn Keefe*

Every school day during the forensic season countless hours nationally are spent in the activity known as forensic coaching. Presumably, forensic educators have always taken heart in observing that their work was instrumental to learning, but not until recently have they begun to scrutinize the process that helps bring a competitor from "unprepared" to "polished." In the author's 1983 dissertation, six main questions about the coaching process for the oral interpretation of poetry are raised and answered.[1] Taking a broad perspective of coaching functions, Jack Rhodes discusses five areas in which coaches can help students to exert their optimal efforts in achieving educational gains.[2] A number of insightful articles, as well as the durable directing forensics books that have perpetually served as guides, examine the nature of particular events, including the rules, and suggest ways for improving preparation, delivery, and judging.[3] Although these just mentioned works do not analyze the process per se, they increase understanding of how to structure and manage coaching sessions and thereby shed light on the process.

In the context of this paper, process is defined as "the action of passing through continuing development from a beginning

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to a contemplated end."[4] Those involved in the process under examination were eight forensic coaches and eight novices from various colleges in the West, Midwest, and East. Each coach was provided with the same three poems on the general theme of animals and children and was instructed to coach his/her novice to the point of tournament readiness in oral interpretation of poetry. Transcripts of the actual coaching sessions were analyzed to discover answers to the six main questions about the process,[5] one of which is discussed in this paper: What sequence patterns, if any, of covering oral interpretation topics emerge from the coaching sessions?

PROCEDURE

To answer this question it was first necessary to determine what topics oral interpretation experts considered essential when preparing for the oral interpretation of poetry. A list of 68 topics was compiled from three highly respected textbooks: Bacon's The Art of Oral Interpretation, Bowen, Aggertt, and Rickert's Communicative Reading, and Lee and Gura's Oral Interpretation.[6] The topics were then grouped into five main areas: 1. Focus on Literary Analysis; 2. Focus on Delivery; 3. Focus on Audience; 4. Focus on Manuscript; and 5. Focus on Forensics.

After the topic list had been drawn up and categorized, the tapescripts were analyzed for topic coverage in each of the 35 total coaching sessions. In some cases the topic was merely mentioned, whereas in others, the matter was discussed at length. The coverage

computation did not measure duration, only whether or not any of the 68 topics was considered by a particular dyad in a particular session. Inasmuch as each topic had the potential for appearing in 35 sessions, the total number for each topic provide a gauge of perceived importance.

RESULTS

In Table 1, shown below, the dyads are grouped according to the number of sessions each coach holds. This is done to facilitate comparisons between the dyads. Wherever an X appears it indicates that the particular topic has been covered by the specified dyad in the specified session. The en dashes are used as column regulators within the sessions and show merely that the given topic is not discussed by the dyad in whose column the dash appears. The absence of an X indicates the absence of coverage. The last column to the right shows the total number of dyadic sessions that cover a particular topic. Only 4 of the 68 topics were omitted by the dyads: repetition; muscle tone/tension; audience context; and functioning of tournaments. Sixty-four topics were covered in at least one session.

Table 1
Oral Interpretation Topics Covered by Each Dyad

Topic	SI Dyad 1246	SII Dyad 1246	SIII Dyad 1246	SIV Dyad 1246	SV Dyad 1246	SI Dyad 357	SII Dyad 357	SIII Dyad 357	SIV Dyad 357	SI Dyad 8	SII Dyad 8	SIII Dyad 8	Total
Focus on Literary Analysis													
1. Choice of material						-X-	-XX		-X-				04
2. Type of poetry						X-X							02
3. Biographical study of author	-X--					--X	--X						03
4. Content of poem													
a. Storyline/ plot	XX-X	XXXX	X--X	X---		XXX	XXX		-X-	X	X		19
b. Setting/ scene	---X	X---	X---		---X	XXX	-XX	--X	-X-				11
c. Theme	XX-X	-XXX	--XX	XXX-	-X--	XXX	XXX	XX-		X	X		22
d. Persona	XX-X	XXXX	X-X-	X-X-	-X--	XXX	-XX	XXX	XXX	X	X		25
e. Mood/ feeling	XX--	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX	XX-X	--X	-XX	XX-	XXX	X	X		27
f. Point of view/attitude(s)/message/truth	XX-X	XXXX	X--X	XXX-	---X	XXX	XX-	XX-		X	X		22
g. Time elements	-X-X	XX--	X--X			XXX	XXX	X--		X			14

Topic	SI Dyad 1246	SII Dyad 1246	SIII Dyad 1246	SIV Dyad 1246	SV Dyad 1246	SI Dyad 357	SII Dyad 357	SIII Dyad 357	SIV Dyad 357	SI Dyad 8	SII Dyad 8	SIII Dyad 8	Total
5. Language of poem													
a. Meaning of words	XX-X	X--X				XXX	-XX				X		11
b. Figures of speech/images/ sensory appeals/visualization	X--X	X-XX	X--X	X-X-	X---	XXX	XXX	-X-	X--	X	X		20
c. Allusion	XX--	-X-X	-XX-	X---		XXX	-XX				X		13
d. Symbolisum/ allegory	---X	--XX				--X	X-X						06
e. Contrast		XX--	XX-X	XXXX	X---		--X	X-X					13
f. Comparison			--X-										01
g. Sound devices	X---		X---										02
h. Rhyme	---X						--X						02
i. Parts of speech	X---					--X							02
j. Emotion-laden words						--X	--X						02
k. Dialect (in poem)	-X--		X--X			--X		-XX					06

Topic	SI Dyad 1246	SII Dyad 1246	SIII Dyad 1246	SIV Dyad 1246	SV Dyad 1246	SI Dyad 357	SII Dyad 357	SIII Dyad 357	SIV Dyad 357	SI Dyad 8	SII Dyad 8	SIII Dyad 8	Total
6. Structure of poem													
a. Stanzas/parts	-X--					-X-					X		03
b. Line run-ons			-X--					--X			X		03
c. Repetition													00
d. Rhythm		-X--				X--	--X						03
e. Climax		X--X	-X--			--X	-XX		X--				07
f. Punctuation	-X--	-X--	-XX-	---X			--X						06
Focus on Delivery													
1. Difference between acting and interpretation								--X					01
2. Vocal elements													
a. Breath control	-X--	-X--	-XX-	--X-	-X--					X	X		08
b. Volume			--X-	--X-	--X-	-X-	-XX	-XX	-XX				10
c. Pitch inflection		-XXX	-X--	X-XX	XX-X	-X-	-XX	--X					14
d. Time/rate/pausing	-X--	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX	-XX	-XX	X-X	X--				24
e. Quality/resonance		--X-	XXX-	--X-	X---	-X-							07
f. Intensity/force/stress		XXXX	XX-X	X-XX	X---		-XX	XXX	XX-		X		19
g. Articulation	-X--	---X	--X-	-X--	-XX-		--X	X-X					09

Topic	SI Dyad 1246	SII Dyad 1246	SIII Dyad 1246	SIV Dyad 1246	SV Dyad 1246	SI Dyad 357	SII Dyad 357	SIII Dyad 357	SIV Dyad 357	SI Dyad 8	SII Dyad 8	SIII Dyad 8	Total
h. Pronunciation/ reader's dialect	-X--	--XX	XXXX	X-XX	X-XX	-X-		--X	X--		X		17
i. Characterization (vocal)		XX-X	X---	X-XX			-XX	X--			X		11
j. Vocal difference between introduction/ transitions and poetry					--XX			X--					03
3. Physical elements													
a. Posture				-X--	-XX-			-X-	-XX				06
b. Muscle tone/ tension													00
c. Gesture	---X			-X--	XXX-	--X			X-X				08
d. Movement (whole body) as opposed to gesture above				XX--	-X--				X-X		X		06
e. Facial expression	---X	X--X	X---	XX--	XXXX	--X	-XX	-X-	X-X		X		17
f. Eye contact		X--X		XX--	X-XX			-X-	X-X				10
g. Character focus/placement		X--X	X---	X---	X---	--X	-X-	X--	X-X				10
h. Characterization (physical)		X-X-	X---	X---					--X				05

Topic	SI Dyad 1246	SII Dyad 1246	SIII Dyad 1246	SIV Dyad 1246	SV Dyad 1246	SI Dyad 357	SII Dyad 357	SIII Dyad 357	SIV Dyad 357	SI Dyad 8	SII Dyad 8	SIII Dyad 8	Total
i. Personal appearance						-X-							01
j. Empathy		-XX-	--X-				-XX						05
k. Handling of manuscript/ binder				X---	-X-X		--X	-X-	XXX				08
l. Memoriza- tion					---X		-X-		X-X	X			05
m. Physical energy			-X--		--X-								02
n. Gender of reader						--X							01
Focus on Audience													
1. Audience anal- ysis								X--	XX-				03
2. Context													00
3. Listener understanding	---X	X--X	--X-	---X	X---	--X	X-X	X--	XXX	X	X		15
4. Attention factors		---X	---X	-X--	X---		X--	X--	XX-				08
5. Critic role				-X--	XX--				XX-				05
6. Audience visual- ization of poem(s)						--X	--X	X--	-X-	X	X		06
7. Response/empa- thy/feedback		--X-	--X-	X-X-	--X-		-XX	-X-	X--				09

Topic	SI Dyad 1246	SII Dyad 1246	SIII Dyad 1246	SIV Dyad 1246	SV Dyad 1246	SI Dyad 357	SII Dyad 357	SIII Dyad 357	SIV Dyad 357	SI Dyad 8	SII Dyad 8	SIII Dyad 8	Total
Focus on Manuscript													
1. Order of selections	X--X	---X	--X-		X---	XXX	XXX	-X-		X			13
2. Introduction/ transitions			--XX	XXXX	XXX-	XX-	XXX	XXX	-X-		X		19
3. Binder/manuscript specifications or description		---X		--XX		-X-	X--	-X-	XXX				09
4. Cutting/editing poetry							--X						01
5. Marking/not marking manuscript		--XX	-X--	-X-X	--X-			--X	X--				08
Focus on Forensics													
1. Attitude toward competition									-X-				01
2. Forensics as learning experience					X---	-X-	-X-	-X-					04
3. Time limit/ timing of program	X---			-X--	X-XX		X--	XX-	XX-		X		11
4. Functioning of tournaments													00

Note. Each session is designated by the abbreviation S, with an accompanying number.

Taking the sessions as a whole, it can be seen that the 64 topics vary widely in the number of sessions in which they appear. The range runs from 1 to 27. For the purpose of classification, the researcher is dividing the range into three parts and designating the upper level (19 to 27) as primary, the middle (10 to 18) as secondary, and the bottom (1 to 9) as tertiary. Nine topics then emerge as primary, 15 as secondary, and 40 as tertiary.

These three classifications are listed below:

Primary Topics
(Considered in 19-27 sessions)

Storyline/plot; theme; persona; mood/feeling; point of view/attitude(s)/message/truth; figures of speech/images/sensory appeals/visualization; time/rate/pausing; intensity/force/stress; and introduction/transitions.

Secondary Topics
(Considered in 10-18 sessions)

Setting/scene; time elements; meaning of words; allusion; contrast; volume; pitch/inflection; pronunciation/reader's dialect; characterization (vocal); facial expression; eye contact; character focus/placement; listener understanding; order of selections; and time limit/timing of program.

Tertiary Topics
(Considered in 1-9 sessions)

Choice of material; type of poetry; biographical study of author; symbolism/allegory; comparison; sound devices; rhyme; parts of speech; emotion-laden words; dialect (in poem); stanzas/parts; line run-ons; rhythm; climax; punctuation; difference between acting and interpretation; breath control; quality/resonance; articulation; vocal difference between introduction/transitions and poetry; posture; gesture; movement (whole body as opposed to gesture); characterization (physical); personal appearance; empathy; handling of manuscript/binder; memorization; physical energy; gender of reader; audience analysis; attention factors; critic role; and audience's visualization of poem(s); response/empathy/feedback; binder/manuscript specifications or description; cutting/editing poetry; marking/not marking manuscript; attitude toward competition; and forensics as learning experience.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Two approaches--one general, the other specific--will be taken to data analysis, both for the five-session coaches and the four-session coaches. The general approach will involve looking at the total number of Xs under each focus area for each group of coaches and computing the percentage of topics covered during each session. For example, the total number of Xs under Focus on Literary Analysis for the five-session dyads is 129. This means that these dyads deal with aspects of literary analysis at least 129 times. But because the research question calls for sequence of coverage, it is necessary to discover what percentage of coverage occurs in each session. To arrive at that answer, the number of Xs shown under each session for the Focus on Literary Analysis section must be divided by the total number or 129. In the example under discussion, the five-session dyads accumulate 32 Xs in Session I. Therefore, 32 divided by 129 equals 24.81%, which is the percentage of coverage for that session. The number is shown in the appropriate column in Table 2. By studying the percentages across the sessions, the increases and decreases become apparent.

The specific approach will be concerned with individual topics. A direct study of Table 1 will be made in order to answer three subquestions: (1) Which topics are covered mainly toward the beginning of the coaching process? (2) Which topics are covered mainly toward the end of the process? (3) Which topics are covered across the coaching sessions?

General Approach to the Research Question

Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the percentage of focus area topics covered in each session by the five-session coaches, the four-session coaches, and the three-session coach respectively.

Table 2

Percentage of Focus Area Topics Covered in Each Session by the Five-Session Coaches

Focus Area	SI	SII	SIII	SIV	SV
Lit. Anal.	24.81	28.68	23.26	16.28	6.98
Delivery	4.72	22.83	19.69	24.41	28.35
Audience	5.56	22.22	16.67	27.78	27.78
Manuscript	8.70	17.39	17.39	34.78	21.74
Forensics	16.67	0.00	0.00	16.67	66.67

Table 3

Percentage of Focus Area Topics Covered in Each Session by the Four-Session Coaches

Focus Area	SI	SII	SIII	SIV
Lit. Anal.	37.86	34.95	16.50	10.68
Delivery	15.28	25.00	26.39	33.33
Audience	8.33	25.00	20.83	45.83
Manuscript	24.00	32.00	24.00	20.00
Forensics	11.11	22.22	33.33	33.33

Table 4

Percentage of Focus Area Topics Covered in Each Session by the Three-Session Coach

Focus Area	SI	SII	SIII
Lit. Anal.	41.18	58.82	0.00
Delivery	25.00	75.00	0.00
Audience	50.00	50.00	0.00
Manuscript	50.00	50.00	0.00
Forensics	0.00	100.00	0.00

Note. For Tables 2-4 the abbreviation Lit. Anal. stands for literary analysis.

The problem in including the three-session coach in the ascertainment of patterns is that the data is insufficient. As shown in Tables 1 and 4, only two sessions yield any oral interpretation topics. The third session is devoted to student performance and coach praise that generalizes about quality. It is sufficient here to observe that the second session, as compared to the first one, has equal or higher percentages in all five focus areas.

The five-session coaches and four-session coaches evidence some similarities in their percentages. Literary analysis drops across the session, except for Session II of the five-session coaches. Delivery, however, shows an increase, except for Session III of the five-session coaches, where the percentage drops approximately three points. For the audience area, the same general pattern of increase, decrease, and increase occurs. The similarities drop off in the last two areas, and no patterns can be found. The only aspect worthy of mention is that in the manuscript area the five-session coaches show the highest percentage in Session IV, whereas this comes for the four-session coaches in Session II.

The clearest direction shown by the data in Tables 2 and 3 is that the coaches as a whole apply the principle articulated by Lee and Gura:

> Only when a student fully understands a literary selection can any reliable performance preparation begin. Thus we have continued our emphasis on the analysis of literary selections as a guide to their appreciation and, more immediately, as the indispensable first step of any rehearsal.[7]

Generally across the sessions, as literary analysis drops, delivery rises. This is particularly true of Coach Three who lets his student do virtually no practicing/performing until Session III, thus devoting the first two sessions to literary analysis. The other six coaches combine the two areas, but all of them show the progression noted above.

Specific Approach to the Research Question

In this part of data analysis, only the primary and secondary topics will be treated because the tertiary topics, ranging across only nine or fewer sessions, are too infrequent to show patterns. The nine primary topics and 15 secondary topics will be studied for patterns.

The first subquestion to be answered is: Which topics are covered mainly toward the beginning of the coaching process? Two matters require attention, one definitional and the other numerical, before this question, as well as the other two, can be answered. In the case of the four-session group, there is no problem in specifying the first two sessions as "toward the beginning" and the last two sessions as "toward the end." The five-session group, however, presents a demarcation problem concerning where Session III should be placed. Two considerations seem to suggest that the first three sessions should be designated as "toward the beginning." Coach One, by dealing with a single poem in Sessions II, III, and IV extends the initial analysis beyond what might be expected. Coach Four does not even start any analysis until Session II, devoting the first

session to an explanation of the project. Because of these procedures, it seems that the first three sessions should be defined as the beginning. In regard to the numerical matter, if more than 50% of the topic choices fall within the beginning of the coaching process, that topic will be considered as manifesting a pattern in that direction. The same percentage criterion will be necessary for a topic to be designated as forming a pattern toward the end of the coaching process. For a topic to be seen as continuing across the sessions, it must be covered by at least one coach in each group during each session.

On the basis of these standards, three of the nine primary topics are covered toward the beginning of the coaching sessions. They are storyline/plot; theme; and point of view/attitude(s)/message/truth. Theme and point of view, etc., each lack only one session from being covered across the sessions. All of them come from the area of literary analysis. Among the 15 secondary topics, 7 fall into the beginning part of the coaching process: setting/scene; time elements; meaning of words; allusion; characterization (vocal); listener understanding; and order of selections. Of these topics, four reside in the area of literary analysis, one in delivery, one in audience, and one in manuscript.

The two remaining categories, that is, the topics that fall into the end of the coaching process and those that span the sessions, emerge from the task of determining the topics in the beginning stage. No primary literary analysis or delivery topic takes an ending pattern, but one from the manuscript area--introduction/transitions--

qualifies for that designation. From the secondary topics in the literary analysis area, the topic of contrast, which is closely related to vocal behavior, is an ending topic, as are the delivery topics of volume, facial expression, and eye contact. In the area of forensics, time limit/timing of program also appears as an ending pattern. This reply, then, answers the second subquestion: Which topics are covered mainly toward the end of the process?

As to the third subquestion--Which topics are covered across the coaching sessions?--there are four of these topics. All are primary topics, of course; three are from the area of literary analysis and one from that of delivery. They are persona; mood/feeling; figures of speech/images/sensory appeals/visualization; and time/rate/pausing.

One primary topic and three secondary topics do not fall into any patterns. They are intensity/force/stress; pitch/inflection; pronunciation/reader's dialect; and character focus/placement.

This analysis shows the importance of various topics, predominantly those from the area of literary analysis, toward the beginning of the process. As the process continues, other topics, now from the areas of manuscript, literary analysis, delivery, and forensics, show a pattern of coverage. The fact that three of the four topics that span the process belong to the area of literary analysis is strong indication that the forensic coaches emphasize the poems as literature study.

CONCLUSION

Although not included in this study, an examination of the

tapescripts to determine further possible patterns would be instructive. Questions such as these could be addressed: When, in regard to each poem, do the coaches conduct literary analysis? At which point do the coaches introduce practice reading? What is the function of perusal? When and how are the introduction and transitions composed? Is there a distinguishable "polishing" stage?

As forensic educators continue to study the process of coaching, whether from the experience of a single coach or, as in this study, the actual practice of multiple coaches, the educational value of applied learning will redound to the students for whom the process is undertaken.

NOTES

[1]See Carolyn Keefe, "The Process of Coaching for Intercollegiate Competition in Oral Interpretation of Poetry," diss. U. of Pennsylvania, 1983. Results involving three of the questions appear in Carolyn Keefe, "Verbal Interactions in Coaching the Oral Interpretation of Poetry," National Forensic Journal 3,1 (1985): 55-69. Another research question, from which the one in the present paper arises, is discussed in Carolyn Keefe, "Topical Concerns in the Poetry Coaching Dyad," in Hal Holloway et al, "Oral Interpretation in Forensic Competition: Representative Papers," National Forensic Journal 4,1 (Spring 1986): 53-73.

[2]Jack Rhodes, "The Director of Forensics as Coach," The Forensic 75, 2 (Winter 1990): 18-23.

[3]See, for example, John E. Crawford, "Toward Standardized Extemporaneous Speech Competition: Tournament Design and Speech Training," National Forensic Journal 2,1 (Spring 1984): 41-55; Kevin W. Dean, "Coaching Rhetorical Criticism," National Forensic Journal 3,2 (Fall, 1985): 116-27; Christina L. Reynolds and Mitchell Fay, "Competitive Impromptu Speaking," National Forensic Journal 5,2 (Fall 1987): 81-94. The "durable" books are Don F. Faules, Richard D. Rieke, and Jack Rhodes, Directing Forensics (Denver: Morton Publishing Co.) 1978 and Donald W. Klopf, Coaching & Directing Forensics (Skokie, IL: National Textbook Co.) 1982.

[4]"Process," Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1966 ed.

[5]This paper extracts and rearranges some sections from the Keefe dissertation, as well as includes some new material.

[6]Wallace A. Bacon, The Art of Interpretation, 3rd. ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1979); Elbert R. Bowen, Otis J. Aggertt, and William E. Rickert, Communicative Reading, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978); Charlotte I. Lee and Timothy Gura, 6th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

[7]Lee and Gura xvii.